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‘RE-EVALUATING THE SITUATIONIST CHALLENGE TO VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY’

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ABSTRACT. The situationist challenge to virtue theory has recently been extended so that it applies not just to virtue ethics but also to virtue epistemology. Focussing on the most developed version of the situationist challenge to virtue epistemology—offered in recent work by Mark Alfano, and applied in different ways to *responsibilist* and *reliabilist* virtue epistemology—it is argued that this critique of virtue epistemology is ultimately unsuccessful. In particular, it is claimed that the crucial distinction that needs to be marked is not between responsibilist and reliabilist renderings of virtue epistemology, but rather between *modest* and *robust* construals of this position. It is shown that the situationist challenge to virtue epistemology at best only impacts on robust virtue epistemology, but since robust virtue epistemology can be shown on independent grounds to be untenable this is not in itself a cause for concern. Moreover, not only is the empirical data appealed to by Alfano in his situationist critique of virtue epistemology compatible with the more plausible modest rendering of virtue epistemology, but it actually lends additional support to the view over its robust counterpart. It is thus concluded that virtue epistemology, at least when properly understood, has nothing to fear from the empirical data offered by situationists against virtue theory.

1. THE SITUATIONIST CHALLENGE TO VIRTUE THEORY

The situationist challenge to virtue theory initially arose with respect to virtue ethics. In broad terms, virtue ethicists treat the character traits of the agent—specifically, her moral virtues—as

fundamental to their ethical theory. The morally good person is the morally virtuous person, where this means an agent possessing the moral virtues and who thus acts appropriately across a range of different situations where morally relevant action is called for. So, for example, the good person will characteristically respond to seeing a person in need by helping them, where their good actions arise out of their recognition that the person is in need and that they ought to help them.

In this way, virtue ethicists make essential appeal to stable character traits (i.e., virtues) in setting out their view. It is precisely this element of the proposal that situationists object to, in that they claim that findings from recent studies in empirical psychology demonstrate that agents do not in general possess such character traits, and instead mostly act in response to particular features of the situation in hand. Here, for example, is Gilbert Harman's summary of the situationist thesis:

We very confidently attribute character traits to other people in order to explain their behaviour. But our attributions tend to be wildly incorrect and, in fact, there is no evidence that people differ in their character traits. They differ in their situations and in their perceptions of their situations. They differ in their goals, strategies, neuroses, optimism, etc. But character traits do not explain what differences there are. (Harman 1998-99, §8)

The studies which putatively support this claim are extensive. They demonstrate that how a subject responds to a situation is in fact highly sensitive to features of the situation (or perceived features of the situation), including features of the situation of which they may be consciously unaware. Such influencing situational factors include such things as ambient odours and sounds, weather conditions, and the presence of bystanders, to list just three. Situationists therefore claim that what explains a subject's actions is not their character (where this involves stable character traits of a virtue-theoretic kind), or not normally their character anyway, but rather how they are responding to the particular situation in hand.¹

Insofar as one grants that these studies do indeed generate this conclusion, then it follows that virtue ethicists are at the very least required to give up on the idea that their view has general application to the folk at large. That is, that while perhaps some particularly sophisticated people out there have the kind of character traits that virtue ethicists postulate, this is not true of most people. Given that virtue ethics is meant to be a proposal with general application, this would be a potentially disastrous consequence for the view.

Of course, as one would expect, virtue ethicists have disputed that these studies do have this disastrous consequence. For example, one main line of counterattack has been to claim that such studies mistakenly equate the behaviour manifested by the agents concerned with the kind of character-driven behaviour that virtue ethicists are concerned with.²

My interest here is not, however, with the challenge posed by situationism to virtue ethics, but rather a putative extension of that challenge to virtue epistemology. On the face of it, whatever challenge that one makes to the former ought to straightforwardly carry over to the latter. After all, since both proposals are forms of virtue theory which hence make essential appeal to the character traits of the agent (whether they be moral or intellectual virtues), then any situationist attack on appeals to character in virtue ethics seem to be *prima facie* just as applicable to virtue epistemology. As we will see, on closer inspection this point is far from clear.

2. SITUATIONISM CONTRA VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY

The clearest expression of the situationist challenge to virtue epistemology in the current literature is offered by Mark Alfano (2012; 2013, part II; *forthcoming*), and so I will focus my attention on his presentation of the problem.³ It is standard practice in the epistemological literature to distinguish between two main types of virtue epistemology—*responsibilist* virtue epistemology and *reliabilist* virtue epistemology—and rather than offering a generic situationist challenge to virtue epistemology, Alfano instead targets these two types of virtue epistemology separately.⁴ There is a very good reason for this, since it is only responsibilist virtue epistemology which conceives of knowledge as being the product of intellectual character traits which are relevantly akin to the moral character traits employed by virtue ethics. That is, for responsibilist virtue epistemology knowledge is the product of intellectual virtues which, like moral virtues, are “motivational and reasons-responsive dispositions to act and react in characteristic ways (e.g., open-mindedness, curiosity, intellectual courage, etc.).” (Alfano 2012, 224) As such, the situationist critique of virtue ethics ought to directly carry over to responsibilist virtue epistemology. In contrast, reliabilist virtue epistemology treats knowledge as being (typically) produced by “non-motivational capacities, dispositions, or process that tend to lead their possessors to increase the balance of truths over falsehoods in their belief sets (e.g., sound deduction, good eyesight, capacious memory, etc.).” (Alfano 2012, 223-4) Given the very different way in which reliabilist virtue epistemology appeals to character traits, it is far from obvious that the situationist critique of virtue ethics should have application here, as Alfano recognises.⁵

Let’s start with Alfano’s situationist attack on responsibility virtue epistemology. Alfano’s strategy is to cite experiments which appear to show that situational factors have a significant

bearing on agents' abilities to complete certain intellectual tasks. For example, he cites the 'Dunker candle task'.⁶ This task is a test of one's intellectual flexibility and creativity, and it demonstrates a particular cognitive bias that agents are subject to, known as *functional fixedness*. The problem that subjects are asked to solve is how to fix a candle to a vertical cork board so that no wax drips. The items offered to the subjects are the candle, a box of tacks and a book of matches. The solution to the puzzle is to empty the box of tacks and use that as a candle holder, but subjects often struggle to recognise this. The problem is that they are thinking of the box as merely a container for the tacks, and not seeing that it can have other uses—that is, they are fixating on the particular function of the box as it is presented to them, and failing to see that the box can perform other functions. In contrast, if subjects are presented with the very same items for performing this task, but with the tacks already removed from the box, then they tend to very quickly recognise that the box can be used to solve the problem in hand.

The manner in which materials are presented to an agent can thus have a significant bearing on that agent's ability to perform a problem-solving task, even though this is intuitively an entirely epistemically irrelevant factor. Alfano further argues that this is not an isolated phenomenon, in that it is possible to manipulate all kinds of situational factors which are intuitively epistemically irrelevant—such as raising a subject's mood by giving them candy before asking them to perform a task—in such a way as to significantly impact on the subject's ability to perform the task.⁷ The conclusion that Alfano draws is that this shows that when subjects are successful in these tasks, the success is not the product of the subject's exercise of intellectual virtue, as responsibilist virtue epistemologists suggest, but rather due to their responsiveness to these, apparently epistemically irrelevant, situational factors.

Alfano's attack on reliabilist virtue epistemology is more targeted than his critique of responsibility virtue epistemology. Indeed, Alfano explicitly grants that reliabilist virtue epistemology is not obviously troubled by the situationist critique when it comes to specifically non-inferential knowledge, since he grants that the processes in play in this regard (perception, memory, and so on), are generally reliable.⁸ Alfano's focus is thus on the reliabilist virtue epistemic account of inferential knowledge. His claim is that such an account founders for the simple reason that "our usual methods of inference [...] are astonishingly unreliable." (Alfano *forthcoming*, 15-16)

The empirical case that Alfano mounts in support of this claim appeals to the well-known examples of cognitive bias developed in various studies conducted since the 1970s by Amos Tversky

and Daniel Kahneman.⁹ Perhaps the most famous of their cases is the ‘Linda’ example (Tversky & Kahneman 2002), which is also employed by Alfano as part of his situationist critique of reliabilist virtue epistemology (Alfano *forthcoming*, §4). In this experiment, subjects are given some information about a person, Linda, such as that she is single and outspoken, very bright, deeply concerned about social justice, and part of the anti-nuclear movement. The subjects are then asked to rate the degree to which Linda is representative of a certain class of people, such as feminists, bank tellers, or feminist bank tellers. Subjects will typically respond by stating that Linda is more representative of feminists than she is of feminist bank tellers, and will therefore judge that it’s more likely that Linda is a feminist than that she is a feminist bank teller. But, of course, it cannot be more likely that a conjunction obtains than that one of its conjuncts obtains (to think otherwise is to fall foul of the conjunction fallacy), and so it cannot be more likely that Linda is a feminist than that she is a feminist and a bank teller. The point of the example is to show that subjects are employing a particular heuristic in their reasoning—the so-called ‘representativeness heuristic’—but that this causes them to engage in fallacious reasoning.

Alfano argues that since cognitive bias of this sort is widespread in our inferential judgements, so the reliabilist virtue epistemic account of knowledge is in doubt. In particular, Alfano argues that the belief-forming processes actually employed by agents when making inferences are not the kind of reliable cognitive abilities described by reliabilist virtue theory, but in fact heuristics which are not generally reliable at all. The upshot is that reliabilist virtue epistemology is incompatible with the idea that we have the kind of widespread inferential knowledge that we ascribe to ourselves.

One way of responding to Alfano’s situationist critique of virtue epistemology could be to bite the bullet and grant that we have far less knowledge than we typically suppose. When it comes to the cognitive bias cases in particular, this route strikes me as fairly plausible, in that one could imagine a reliabilist virtue epistemology simply conceding that the upshot of this empirical work is that inferential knowledge is much harder to attain across a range of cases than we hitherto imagined. For now, however, I will setting this dialectical option to one side (we will return to it later).

A second way of responding to Alfano’s critique of virtue epistemology might be to dispute the empirical data on which it depends, or at least argue against the particular conclusions that Alfano is deriving from this data. I have some sympathy with this style of response too, since it is not clear to me either that we should take these experimental results at face value as Alfano does, or that they pose the general challenge to virtue epistemology that Alfano imagines.¹⁰ Nonetheless, I will not be responding to the situationist critique of virtue epistemology in this way. Instead, I will

be arguing that once virtue epistemology is understood correctly, it is in fact entirely compatible with the empirical studies that Alfano cites.

3. MODEST VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY AND THE SITUATIONIST CRITIQUE

In the last section we saw that Alfano offers a different version of the situationist critique of virtue epistemology depending on whether it is responsibilist or reliabilist virtue epistemology that is at issue. But there is another way of classifying virtue-theoretic proposals in epistemology which is of far more relevance to the situationist challenge, one which cuts across the responsibilist/reliabilist distinction. This is the distinction between *modest* and *robust* virtue-theoretic accounts of knowledge. According to the former, it is merely a necessary condition for knowledge that the cognitive success in question be the product of (depending on the form of virtue epistemology in play) a cognitive ability or intellectual virtue. According to the latter, in contrast, knowledge is to be exclusively defined in terms of cognitive success which is appropriately related to cognitive ability/intellectual virtue.¹¹

If virtue epistemology, of either a reliabilist or responsibility variety, is construed along robust lines, then Alfano's situationist critique will have some bite. Crucially, however, virtue epistemology is only ever plausible when construed along modest lines.

In order to see this point, let us briefly consider a version of robust virtue epistemology which has been offered by John Greco (2003; 2007; 2008; 2009*a*; 2009*b*), and which is broadly speaking a reliabilist proposal (albeit one with some responsibilist elements to it). According to Greco, knowledge is, roughly, cognitive success (i.e., true belief) that is because of one's cognitive ability, where this means that the cognitive success in question is primarily creditable to the exercise of one's cognitive ability.¹² So, for example, the agent in a standard Gettier-style case lacks knowledge on this proposal because while he is cognitively successful and has manifested cognitive ability in forming his true belief, his cognitive success is not primarily creditable to the exercise of his cognitive ability but rather due to the epistemic luck that is in play.

Robust virtue epistemology is certainly posed a *prima facie* threat by the situationist challenge. On both a responsibilist and reliabilist rendering, the worry will be that in a wide range of cases what primarily explains the agent's cognitive success is not her exercise of her cognitive abilities but rather

other factors outwith her cognitive agency, such as situational factors.

The problem with robust virtue epistemology, however, is that it is independently implausible, and so the fact that it may be subject to the situationist challenge is ultimately neither here nor there. In particular, the proposal is implausible in that it is both too strong and too weak.¹³ It is too strong because in epistemically friendly conditions agents can acquire knowledge even though their cognitive success is not primarily creditable to the exercise of their cognitive ability/intellectual virtue. In testimonial cases, for example, subjects can (on standard accounts of the epistemology of testimony at any rate) come to acquire testimonial knowledge in epistemically friendly conditions by for the most part trusting the word of a knowledgeable informant. But we would not say in such cases that the subject's cognitive success is primarily creditable to her cognitive agency, as opposed to the cognitive agency of the informant.

Robust virtue epistemology is also too weak in that in epistemically unfriendly conditions even a cognitive success that is primarily creditable to the agent's exercise of their cognitive ability/intellectual virtue will not suffice for knowledge. In 'barn façade'-style cases, for example, an agent's cognitive success (e.g., at identifying the target barn) is no less attributable to their cognitive agency than it is in parallel cases where there are no façades in the vicinity. And yet the presence of the façades in the vicinity ensures that this is a lucky, and thus Gettierized, cognitive success, in that it is a cognitive success that could so very easily have been failure.¹⁴

The point is that knowledge exhibits what I have elsewhere called an *epistemic dependence* on factors outwith the cognitive agency of the subject, where this epistemic dependency has both a positive and negative aspect.¹⁵ It is positive when an agent exhibits a relatively low degree of cognitive agency, and yet qualifies as having knowledge nonetheless due to factors outwith her cognitive agency, such as epistemically friendly features of the environment (e.g., the kind of features that obtain in the testimonial case just considered). And it is negative when an agent exhibits a high degree of cognitive agency—such that they would ordinarily count as having knowledge—and yet they lack knowledge nonetheless due to factors outwith their cognitive agency, such as epistemically unfriendly features of the environment (e.g., the kind of features that obtain in the barn façade case just considered).

Once one recognises the epistemic dependency of knowledge, then robust virtue epistemology ceases to be an option. Modest virtue epistemology, in contrast, is entirely compatible with the epistemic dependence of knowledge, since it merely claims that one's knowledge should be the product of cognitive ability/intellectual virtue, thereby allowing that there can be other conditions

on knowledge over and above the epistemic virtue condition. Is modest virtue epistemology susceptible to the situationist critique?

In order to evaluate this issue we need to return to the situationist challenge and identify exactly what it purports to show. In particular, in order for the situationist challenge to impact even on modest virtue epistemology it needs to demonstrate that in a wide range of cases not just that the agent's cognitive success, where it occurs, is not primarily creditable to her exercise of her cognitive abilities/intellectual virtues, but moreover that the agent's cognitive success is not *in any significant way* the product of her cognitive abilities/intellectual virtues. Do the cases offered by the situationist establish this stronger claim?

I suggest not. Take first the kind of case which Alfano presents against responsibilist virtue epistemology, such as the Duncker candle test. One immediate moral of such examples is that we should lower our confidence in our problem-solving abilities, given that they have been empirically shown to be less effective than we might have hitherto supposed. This is a kind of mitigated scepticism, but it is not yet the full-blown scepticism which Alfano imagines as being one route out of this problem for the responsibilist virtue epistemology. In order to get the more full-blown scepticism we need to move from considering cases where cognitive bias—in this case functional fixedness—stands in the way of cognitive success, and consider parallel cases where, due to purely situational factors, the agent is cognitive successful. That is, Alfano's claim must be that since it is just situational factors (including their absence) which often make the difference between cognitive success and cognitive failure, so even in cases of cognitive success we should not attribute this cognitive success to the subject's epistemic virtue (conceived along responsibilist lines), but to the situational factors. The scepticism thus extends out from the 'bad' cases where cognitive bias stands in the way of cognitive success, and infects even the 'good' cases where the subject is cognitive successful.

With this point in mind, imagine now that the Duncker problem is posed for the subject in a way that ensures that she does not fall foul of functional fixedness, and so easily solves the problem. That the situation has been set up to ensure success makes trouble for the idea that we should regard her cognitive success as primarily creditable to her cognitive agency, and so there is a *prima facie* tension between this empirical data, so described anyway, and robust virtue epistemology. That is, we should grant to Alfano that the fact that a mere change in situational factors can mark the difference between cognitive success and cognitive failure indicates that it is at least problematic to suppose that it is the subject's cognitive agency which is the overarching explanation for her

cognitive success.

But once we move from robust virtue epistemology to modest virtue epistemology, even when cast along responsibilist lines, even this *prima facie* tension disappears. For sure, features of the situation are playing an explanatory role in the subject's cognitive success; that much is not in question. But surely the subject's cognitive abilities are also playing a significant role too (albeit one in concert with the situational factors)? If one holds that knowledge is simply a function of cognitive agency, in line with robust virtue epistemology, then there is a potential problem with situational factors having this influence on the subject's cognitive success. But if one explicitly grants, with modest virtue epistemology, that there is an epistemic dependence to knowledge acquisition, such that it isn't merely a function of cognitive agency, then one can allow that the acquisition of knowledge might well be dependent upon such extra-agential situational factors and yet be *bona fide* nonetheless. What counts is only that a significant degree of cognitive agency is on display. In the right circumstances—i.e., where the environment is effectively primed for success, as it is in the case where the situational circumstances are propitious—even quite a limited degree of cognitive agency can suffice for knowledge. Far from showing that modest virtue epistemology is untenable, such cases appear to offer empirical support for the view over its robust counterpart.

The same is true even if we turn to the cognitive biases that Alfano cites against reliabilist virtue epistemology. As before, we need to recognise from the outset that such cases offer by everyone's lights a basis for endorsing a mitigated scepticism about inferential knowledge. If cognitive bias is rife in our reasoning, then we should be less confident that we can gain knowledge via such reasoning. In order for this mitigated scepticism to translate into a more full-blown scepticism, however, it needs to be the case that even where agents are not subject to cognitive bias they nonetheless lack knowledge.

It is clear in the case of responsibilist virtue epistemology that Alfano thinks the move from the mitigated scepticism to the more full-blown scepticism is motivated by the fact that merely situational (and thus epistemically irrelevant) factors mark the difference between cases of cognitive failure due to cognitive bias and parallel cases of cognitive success where cognitive bias does not lead to cognitive failure. It is not so clear what the corresponding 'bridging' claim in his argument is when it comes to reliabilist virtue epistemology, but I take it the thought must be that since there is nothing in a normal agents' reasoning practices which differentiates between the reasoning which involves cognitive bias and that which is free from cognitive bias, so all inferential knowledge is called into question by the phenomenon of widespread cognitive bias.

The problem with this kind of bridging claim, however, is that it is susceptible to the very same kind of response which we just saw levelled at Alfano's critique of responsibilist virtue epistemology. If the reliability of one's reasoning is not responsive to the presence of cognitive bias, then when one's reasoning is successful one's cognitive success can hardly be primary creditable to one's cognitive agency. This much seems undeniable. But this is only a problem for a robust virtue epistemology which does not allow for the epistemic dependency of knowledge. For the modest (reliabilist) virtue epistemologist, in contrast, that one's cognitive success, while being significantly creditable to one's cognitive agency, might be in addition creditable to other factors, such as that one is presented with information in such a way as not to trigger a cognitive bias, is not in itself a problem for the view.¹⁶

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Whether the situational critique extends to virtue epistemology depends, I have argued, less on whether one opts for a responsibilist or reliabilist rendering of this thesis, and more on the kind of virtue epistemology one wishes to advance. In particular, it is only if one offers a robust virtue epistemology which bravely attempts to make knowledge a function of cognitive agency that the empirical data the situationist offers against virtue epistemology presents even the *prima facie* challenge that that Alfano imagines. Once we move to a modest virtue epistemology—a dialectical shift which I have claimed is motivated on independent grounds—there is not even the *prima facie* tension with the situationist's empirical data. The reason for this is that a modest virtue epistemology explicitly embraces the phenomenon of the epistemic dependence of knowledge, and so can allow that factors outwith cognitive agency can have a significant role to play in the acquisition of knowledge. Indeed, it turns out that not does the empirical data offered by situationism not pose a challenge to virtue epistemology, properly conceived, but that it effectively offers empirical support for the particular brand of virtue epistemology that most proponents of the view recognise to be the most compelling version of the thesis. Properly conceived, then, virtue epistemology has nothing to fear from the situationist critique.¹⁷

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NOTES

¹ For an excellent overview of the relevant empirical literature, see Doris (2002). See also Prinz (2009). For a comprehensive and up-to-date bibliographical survey of the literature on situationism and virtue theory (including both empirical and philosophical literature, and covering both historical and contemporary sources), see Alfano & Fairweather (*forthcoming*).

² See, for example, Merritt (2000) and Sreenivasan (2002). For an interesting variation on this kind of response to situationism, see Sosa (2009*b*).

³ See also Doris & Olin (*forthcoming*) for a critique of virtue epistemology which runs along the same lines as that found in Alfano (2012; 2013, part II; *forthcoming*). Although the literature on situationism as it applies to virtue epistemology is currently still nascent, there are a few useful works available. See, for example, Axtell (2010), Baehr (2011, *passim*), and Hazlett (2013, *passim*). See also Fairweather & Montemayor (*forthcoming*), which is a response to Alfano (2012), and Pritchard (*forthcomingb*).

⁴ For an excellent overview of contemporary virtue epistemology which marks this distinction particularly well, see Axtell (1997).

⁵ For an example of a reliabilist virtue-theoretic proposal, see the agent reliabilist position defended in early work by Greco (1999; 2000). For a very different neo-Aristotelian virtue-theoretic proposal which incorporates responsibilist elements, see Zagzebski (1996).

⁶ See Duncker (1945), cited in Alfano (2012, 235).

⁷ See Doris & Olin (*forthcoming*) for a fairly comprehensive overview of the relevant empirical literature in this regard.

⁸ Though even that could be in dispute. As Doris & Olin (*forthcoming*, §5) point out, for example, the reliability of one's vision can be dependent upon such apparently irrelevant factors as whether the visual scene in question is presented to the upper-right side of one's visual field. In order to keep the discussion manageable, in what follows I will be setting this concern to one side.

⁹ Alfano focuses on Tversky & Kahneman (1973; 2002).

¹⁰ For example, consider again the Linda case. It has been widely noted in the psychological literature that subjects' judgements about the likelihood of an event are often best understood along counterfactual rather than probabilistic lines. (For a survey of some of the relevant psychological literature in this regard, see Pritchard & Smith (2004)). For instance, a subject might regard an event which they grant has a very low probability of occurring as being nonetheless very risky if they judge that it is the kind of event which could very easily happen to them. Conversely, if subjects judge that an event could not very easily happen to them, then they might regard it as not being risky even while simultaneously granting that it has a high probability of occurring. The relevance of this point to the Linda case is that when subjects judge it to be more likely that Linda is a feminist than that she is a feminist bank teller, they could be charitably construed as offering a (correct) counterfactual judgement. That is, given what they know about Linda, that she could more easily be a feminist than that she could be a feminist bank teller. So construed the subjects are not committing the conjunction fallacy at all. (A broadly similar line of response to the Linda case is offered by Gigerenzer (2010, 70-73; cf. Gigerenzer 2007, ch. 6) and discussed in Fairweather & Montemayor (*forthcoming*, §4)). Note that I'm not suggesting that all of the cognitive bias cases can be resolved in this way. The point is rather that once we start to examine these cases more carefully, then it's far from obvious that they pose the general challenge to inferential judgements that Alfano supposes, rather than merely showing that we do not have as much inferential knowledge as we typically suppose.

¹¹ I've drawn the distinction between robust and modest virtue epistemology—or 'strong' and 'weak' virtue epistemology, as I sometimes put it—in a number of works. See, for example, Pritchard (2009*b*, ch. 3; 2012), Pritchard, Millar & Haddock (2010, ch. 2), and Kallestrup & Pritchard (2012; 2013; *forthcoming*).

¹² Broadly similar robust virtue-theoretic proposals can be found in the work of Sosa (1988; 1991; 2007; 2009*a*) and Zagzebski (1996; 1999). Interestingly, in earlier work—most notably Greco (1999; 2000)—Greco offered what we are here describing as a weak virtue epistemology.

¹³ I develop this two-pronged critique of robust virtue epistemology in a number of places. See Pritchard (2009*a*; 2009*b*, ch. 3; 2009*c*; 2009*d*; 2012), Pritchard, Millar & Haddock (2010, chs. 2-4), and Kallestrup & Pritchard (2012; 2013; *forthcoming*).

¹⁴ Notice that the point in play here is not one that can be met by relativizing cognitive abilities to environments and conditions which are very narrowly conceived, as some have been tempted to do (for example, Greco (2009*a*, ch. 5) or, approaching the issue from a slightly different angle, Fairweather & Montemayor (*forthcoming*, §7)). For one thing, as Doris & Olin (*forthcoming*, §6) point out, a virtue epistemology cast along these lines will be so far removed from the explanatory task that the view is meant to be engaged with as to be self-defeating. For another, and more importantly, such a tactic will not in any case work to deal with the problem posed here as one would need to make cognitive abilities

narrowly relativized not just to actual environments and conditions but also to one's *modal* environment, and on no plausible conception of abilities (cognitive or otherwise) are they relativized in this way. For more on this specific point, see, for example, Kallestrup & Pritchard (*forthcoming*).

¹⁵ See, especially, Kallestrup & Pritchard (2013).

¹⁶ I think that this point has important implications for the epistemology of education, since the dominant view in this regard is one on which the goal of education is the promotion of knowledge, where knowledge is in turn understood along broadly virtue-theoretic lines. (For a useful survey of the literature on the epistemological goals of education, see Robertson (2009)). Situationism, as applied to virtue epistemology, is thus potentially in conflict with the leading proposals in the epistemology of education. It is thus important to show that virtue epistemology, properly construed, can evade the situationist challenge. For more on the situationist challenge as it applies to the epistemology of education, see Pritchard (*forthcomingb*; cf. Pritchard *forthcominga*, §1).

¹⁷ Thanks to Abrol Fairweather and Allan Hazlett for helpful discussions on related topics. Special thanks to Mark Alfano for detailed comments on an earlier version of this paper.